

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Olympia Washington

Bil Analysis

Bil No. HB 2671

Clarifying procedures/absentee voting/mail ballots  
Brief title

Hrg Date: 1/27/98

Reps. D. Schmidt/Scott

Sponsor

Staff Steve Lundin

Comm. on Govt. Admin.

Phone: 786-7127

**BACKGROUND:**

Voters may vote using different procedures, including casting regular ballots at polling places, casting absentee ballots, and casting mail ballots.

A voter may obtain an absentee ballot for a single election or primary or may become an on-going absentee voter and automatically receive an absentee ballot for all elections and primaries.

Absentee ballots returned to the county auditor may be processed beginning 90 days prior to the election or primary for which they are issued, which include all the normal processing steps necessary to prepare the ballots for tabulation. Absentee ballots may not be tabulated until after the close of the polls on the day of the election or primary.

Mail ballot voting is allowed as follows:

- o The county auditor may designate a precinct with 200 or fewer active registered voters as a vote-by-mail precinct. All active and inactive registered voters in a newly created vote-by-mail precinct are sent a card inquiring whether they want a mail ballot when the precinct is first designated as a vote-by-mail precinct. Only those voters returning the card are sent a mail ballot. All elections and primaries in a vote-by-mail precinct are conducted using mail ballots.
- o Any local government may request that a mail ballot election be held at a special election or request be called, if the special election is not held in conjunction with a state primary or general election and if a partisan elective office is not considered at the primary or election. If a mail ballot election is approved by the county auditor, mail ballots mailed to each active registered voter in the local government and either a mail ballot or a card to request a mail ballot mailed to each inactive registered voter in the local government.

Mail ballots are generally processed in the same manner as absentee ballots. However, mail ballots may not be forwarded.

#### **SUMMARY:**

Statutes providing for mail ballots are codified in a chapter of law separate from the chapter of law providing for absentee ballots. A variety of changes are made for absentee ballots and mail ballots.

#### **ABSENTEE BALLOTS**

##### **1. Requesting absentee ballots.**

The last day a voter may request an absentee ballot is moved from the day before the primary or election to the day of the primary or election. The special process for voters confined to a hospital to request absentee ballots on the day of the primary or election by messenger is expanded to include persons confined in health care facilities and requirements are eliminated for verification of the status of the person who is hospitalized.

A request for an absentee ballot may be made electronically.

##### **2. Special absentee ballots.**

Specific reasons for issuing special absentee ballots for a specific election or primary are eliminated and voters requesting special absentee ballots need only state that they will be unable to vote and return a regular absentee ballot by normal mail within the normal period.

##### **3. Ballots used to elect precinct committee officers**

Elections for the office of precinct committee officer that are considered in even-numbered year general elections may be included in the regular absentee ballot or included in a separate absentee ballot.

##### **4. Replacement absentee ballots.**

A registered voter who is eligible to receive an absentee ballot may obtain a replacement ballot if the ballot is destroyed, spoiled, lost, or not received. The request may be made by telephone, mail, electronically, or in person.

Continued

5. Absentee ballot voting at polling place.

It is clarified that a voter attempting to vote at his or her precinct who has been issued an absentee ballot for an election or primary or who is an on-going absentee voter, is allowed to vote at the precinct using a special ballot. But the special ballots not counted if the canvassing board finds the voter has also voted by absentee ballot.

6. Processing and tabulating absentee ballots.

It is clarified that the processing of absentee ballots may commence 10 days prior to the election or primary includes removing ballots from inner security envelopes, inspecting ballots for damage, write-in votes or incorrect or incomplete marks, and making a true duplicate copy of any damaged ballot. Absentee ballots may be fed into and read by electronic tabulating systems commencing at 7:00 AM on the day of the primary election. However, absentee ballots may not be tabulated until after the close of the polls.

County auditors must notify county chairs of major political parties when absentee ballot processing will commence.

7. Tracking absentee ballots.

It is clarified that absentee ballot results must be reported on a congressional and legislative district basis, in addition to being included to the total votes cast at polling places.

A list of absentee ballots that have been returned must be kept on a daily basis.

8. Terminating status as ongoing absentee voter.

Status as an ongoing absentee voter is terminated if the voter is placed on inactive voter registration rolls.

MAIL BALLOT ELECTIONS

1. Vote-by-mail precincts.

The process for distribution of ballots in a vote-by-mail precincts altered for the first election or primary after a vote-by-mail precinct has been designated. The auditor mails a mail ballot to each active registered voter and either mails a mail ballot or a request for a mail ballot to each inactive registered voter in the precinct at that election.

Notice of that a vote-by-mail precinct is being converted back to normal voting procedures, together with the address of the new polling place, must be made to each voter in a vote-by-mail precinct whenever the number of registered voters in the precinct exceeds 200 or if the county auditor determines to return the vote-by-mail precinct to normal procedures.

2. Mailballots in general.

Mailballots are generally treated in the same manner as absentee ballots. The prohibition on forwarding mailballots is altered. Mailballots may be forwarded by the post office if instructions to voters include a clear statement of qualifications necessary to vote and advise a voter with questions to contact the county auditor. A mailballot may not be forwarded if this information is not included.

A replacement ballot in a mailballot election may only be issued at the county auditor's office.

The auditor may expand the times when mailballots may be deposited with the auditor rather than returned by mail beyond the hours when polls are open during the day of the primary or election.

**FISCAL NOTE:** Not requested.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.